

challenged by others and how they respond to these challenges. This is just one example. Social diversity demands our attention. I believe that as we recruit participants to reflect the reality of today's relational demographics, we will need to revise our research questions, theories and models to reflect underlying erroneous presumptions, such as the presumption of heterosexuality and the presumption of access to marriage.

Comments by Rebecca Adams (Sociology, University of North Carolina at Greenboro)

Lately personal relationship researchers have been paying more attention to the impact of social structural and cultural context on personal relationships. As a sociologist, I am hoping that this trend continues and develops further. Two specific challenges related to this general one will be to study virtual and cross-cultural relationships. A great deal of personal relationship theory assumes that the participants at least initially interact face-to-face; now that this assumption is clearly no longer valid, scholars will need to modify old theories and develop new ones if we are to understand the impact of contemporary developments in communications and transportation technology on social life. Although family researchers have conducted studies in a variety of cultural settings, most of the research on friendship and other types of non-family close relationships has been conducted on general North American populations. We therefore do not yet currently understand how culture shapes relationships among those who share the same values, beliefs, and norms, let alone what happens when people form and maintain relationships across cultural or subcultural boundaries.

Comments by Pearl Dykstra (Social Demography, Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute)

Challenges for relationship researchers as the 21st century begins: A few quick thoughts

It will be all the more important to study personal relationships against the backdrop of *social change*. Examples of kinds of social change to consider:

- *Extension of life*. People are living longer lives. They are aging together. It is not uncommon for lives (friendships, siblings, parents and children) to overlap 60 or 70 years. Ironically, relationship research tends to focus on the early stages of the life course. It's time to expand our focus to later stages of life or to pay greater attention to intergenerational ties (e.g. friendships between people belonging to different generations). Do people with cross-generation friendships age better?
- *Changing marriage patterns*. Family networks are becoming more complex with the rise in divorce, repartnering, and childbearing in successive partnerships. Are people's networks expanding (with stepies, halfsiblings, ex-partners, etc)? How do people negotiate 'complex' family ties (i.e. biological and non-biological kin)?
- *Informal partnerships*. Not all couples opt for marriage, preferring to cohabit unmarried or to have separate households. How different are these kinds of partnerships (e.g. in terms of commitment, the outcomes for children, participation in friendship networks, relationships to in-laws).
- *Migration*. European countries are becoming 'receiving' countries, which is a strong change from the past when people left Europe for other continents. The population is becoming less homogeneous. The groups to which people belong differ not only by activity (school, work, family, leisure, church) but also by ethnicity. How do people manage the different kinds of relationships? Are relationships compartmentalized within groups? What are the implications of multiple group memberships for identity formation, values and beliefs?